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Evaluation

Management response to the independent review of the UNDP evaluation policy

Context, background and findings

1. UNDP concurs with the main findings regarding the relevance of the UNDP evaluation policy. UNDP acknowledges that the findings confirm a number of issues with respect to implementation of the evaluation policy, including the need for increasing organizational commitment to results-based management (RBM) and the performance of the decentralized evaluation system. UNDP senior management is fully committed to addressing these challenges and strengthening the culture of RBM across the organization.

Actions already taken or ongoing to strengthen RBM and evaluation performance in UNDP

2. UNDP is investing in its capacity for results-based planning, monitoring and evaluation at country, regional and global levels. Particular efforts are under way to strengthen the role of Regional Bureaux in their oversight and support functions with country offices and in improving overall country office performance in RBM, including in the conduct of decentralized evaluations. For instance, within available resources, investment is being made to professionalize the monitoring and evaluation function at the country level. In line with the recommendations of the review, UNDP is working to shift from a passive 'compliance' approach to one in which there is proactive demand for evaluative evidence. We want it to be viewed as an indispensable part of our dialogue with host government partners on the effectiveness of our approaches and the extent to which they are contributing to achievement of national results. The aim is to see results-based planning, monitoring and evaluation as an iterative process that enables us to work with our national partners to ensure the relevance of our work and to adapt and reshape it based on evidence while there is still time in the programme cycle to improve.

3. At the central level, the Bureau for Development Policy has established a management system for the new global programme that ensures results orientation and accountability through strengthened corporate management and compliance with UNDP programming requirements. Up to 3 per cent of the resources of the global programme have been allocated for monitoring and evaluation and for strategic reviews for learning and

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management action. This will allow the Bureau to increase the number and quality of decentralized evaluations. Similar steps are being taken at the regional programme level; for instance, the Regional Bureau for Africa has allocated 5 per cent of regional project budgets for monitoring and evaluation. The Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery is formulating a three-year results framework in line with the corporate outcomes in the Strategic Plan and is bolstering its Knowledge Management and Monitoring and Evaluation Team with two staff in New York and two in Geneva. A new results-based reporting system with strengthened monitoring and evaluation is under construction to provide regular updates on the multi-year results framework. The Partnerships Bureau is undertaking a review to ensure proper evaluation coverage for initiatives under its guardianship, and the Bureau of Management continues to work on refining the tools and systems aimed at strengthening and facilitating results-based management and evaluation.

4. In conducting audits of country offices, the Office of Audit and Investigations verifies whether evaluations and reviews conducted to assess performance of United Nations common programming tools (country programme documents [CPDs], country programme action plans) represent a coherent system that provides sufficient coverage for management for results and to support organizational accountability. More specifically, auditors ascertain whether the evaluation practice in the country office is contributing effectively to development results and whether lessons learned are incorporated for future programming. Auditors also ascertain whether there is adequate implementation of the evaluation plan, and specifically of mandatory outcome evaluations.

5. Other steps taken include the launch in 2009 of the revised Handbook on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating for Development Results, which complements the Programme and Policies Operations and Procedures guide by providing practical guidance on how to plan, monitor and evaluate for development results. The new Handbook recognizes that clear results planning with national partners is a prerequisite for effective programme design and that planning, monitoring and evaluation require a focus on nationally owned development priorities and results. Since 2009, nine RBM workshops have been held at headquarters, regional and country level, training over 400 staff from 67 country offices on the Handbook's approaches. An online learning platform on managing for development results is expected to be launched by 2011.

6. The UNDP organizational culture is gradually shifting towards more systematic RBM, but it will require more time to provide better articulated results frameworks with our national partners, supported by deeper learning through peer review and evaluation. UNDP agrees that an important focus should be on whether planned programmes can be evaluated (their 'evaluability'), a prerequisite for effective programme design, continuous monitoring with national partners and evaluation. UNDP also recognizes that after Executive Board approval of the CPD, realities on the ground can shift, requiring revisions in the objective and approach to programme implementation. We commit to work closely with our national partners to maximize results articulation in a way that will facilitate evaluation throughout the planning and design process and to assist our partners (when asked) to strengthen their own capacities for RBM to improve development effectiveness.

Proposed approach on decentralized evaluation compliance

7. In response to the review's recommendations, UNDP proposes to (1) base evaluation compliance on full implementation of the evaluation plan developed in consultation with the government and attached to the CPD and (2) revise the current approach to decentralized evaluation compliance to better take into account the needs of country ownership and United Nations reform at the country level. UNDP offices have expressed concern that the current practice of outcome evaluation is of limited utility because it does

not provide convincing lessons with regard to the link between the UNDP contribution and the wider, multi-partner outcome. It is only through the combined contributions of many partners, notably national partners, that improved outcomes are possible. Therefore, UNDP proposes to provide country offices a greater range of decentralized evaluation instruments to discuss with national partners, including participation in multi-partner sector-level evaluations, when relevant.

8. Specifically, UNDP proposes a three-part approach to strengthening evaluation compliance: (1) higher quality project evaluations based on stronger results frameworks that more clearly articulate the link to outcome level progress; (2) participation in relevant outcome, sector, and/or programme evaluations when undertaken by partners at national level, coupled with more systematic use of midterm outcome-oriented programmatic evaluation (CPD midterm evaluation); and (3) independent coverage by the Evaluation Office through a combination of assessment of development results (ADRs) and other independent reviews at the end of the programme cycle. The conduct of outcome evaluations in partnership with the government and/or United Nations agencies and/or donors would make these evaluations more strategic and more useful for UNDP partners at the country level, including the government, while maintaining standards of independence and credibility. Clear guidance will be provided to country offices to ensure that joint evaluations include an assessment of the distinctive UNDP contribution to the shared outcome.

9. Guidance to country offices on the minimum standards for evaluation coverage will be revised based on this approach. Compliance will be judged based on the extent of coverage compared to the evaluation plan in the CPD and any revisions agreed with the government over the course of the programme cycle. Quality standards will also be integrated into the performance assessment instruments, such as the balanced score card to encourage greater demand and to motivate response to lower-than-desired quality ratings on current decentralized evaluations.

Proposed requirement on financing

10. UNDP country offices face recurring challenges in funding decentralized evaluations, as resources for them must be negotiated case by case. To increase the predictability of funding, UNDP will establish implementation options for country offices in new programmes starting in 2011. Such resources would need to be fungible for use in project, programme or thematic evaluations and for participation in outcome or other multi-partner evaluations in line with the approved evaluation plan. This funding would be provided only for evaluations agreed in the plan and or agreed subsequently through formal revision and approval with national counterparts. UNDP will require full costing of all evaluation plans attached to CPDs, regional programme documents and global programme documents before presentation to the Executive Board.

Proposed approach to support decentralized evaluation

11. In response to the review, UNDP is working to better define roles and responsibilities for decentralized evaluation. Country offices are expected to put in place appropriate institutional arrangements to manage and follow up on decentralized evaluations. As part of their oversight role, Regional Bureaux are responsible for ensuring (1) the adequacy of the monitoring plan to underpin eventual evaluations; (2) the quality of results frameworks to improve the evaluability of programmes; (3) the quality of evaluation plans, including adequate coverage of programmes; and (4) that country office institutional arrangements are adequate, monitoring visits are documented and management responses are prepared for all evaluations and action taken. For this purpose, Regional Bureaux can draw on

information available in the Evaluation Resource Centre. The role and responsibilities of country advisors are also being clarified, including as regards the conduct of evidence-based substantive discussions on results with country offices. This should, in turn, encourage demand and use of evidence from evaluation at the country office level. For its part, the Evaluation Office will continue to provide standards and guidelines to support the capacity of regional evaluation advisors.

Use of evaluations

12. To ensure strong leadership from senior management, "Recurring findings and recommendations from independent evaluations" is now a standing semi-annual item on the agenda of the Management Group chaired by the Administrator (covering strategic direction and learning) and the Operations Group, chaired by the Associate Administrator (covering operational follow-up). Both forums review and discuss independent and decentralized thematic evaluations, as well as management responses to global, regional and South-South programme evaluations. Whenever possible, management responses to independent evaluations of ongoing global and regional programmes are discussed with the draft programme document for the subsequent programming cycle, to facilitate learning and incorporation of evaluation findings into the design of new programmes.

13. UNDP is upgrading its efforts in knowledge management, knowledge networks, peer review mechanisms and learning from evaluation. Real-time sharing of information and experience through the knowledge systems and peer mechanisms are also important components of organizational learning and will be used more systematically to complement learning from evaluation. At the same time, UNDP recognizes that quality evaluations provide valuable evidence-based information to UNDP managers and partners on whether results are being achieved effectively towards achievement of national priorities.

14. In addition, UNDP offers the following additional comments on the methodology of the review:

(a) The Internet-based survey resulting in tables 1, 2 and 3 on the perception of why UNDP has an Evaluation Policy, knowledge about the Policy and perceptions of its usefulness had a response rate of 9 per cent. This low rate calls into question the value of this "perception" analysis, as amply recognized by the reviewers in the footnote.

(b) The reviewers recognize that the period of data collection for field visits was extremely short (30 days) and encompassed only four offices – the Johannesburg Regional Service Centre and the country offices for Egypt, Swaziland and Viet Nam). UNDP believes that more data might have helped the reviewers to form a more nuanced picture of implementation of the Evaluation Policy.

15. The annex on the following pages outlines the main recommendations of the Policy Review and the UNDP response, including steps the organization is taking to address the issues raised.

Annex. Key recommendations and management response to independent review of the UNDP evaluation policy

Evaluation recommendation 1. UNDP senior management must decide whether decentralized evaluation is of a high enough priority that it is willing to commit the focus and resources needed to implement the approaches envisaged in the new Handbook on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating for Development Results. Management should do this by:

(a) Acknowledging the magnitude of the challenge;

(b) Taking a clear lead in ensuring that changes envisaged are implemented as quickly and effectively as possible;

(c) Revising the UNDP Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures (POPP) where necessary, to ensure alignment between the handbook and policies and procedures; and

(d) Defining the means, capacities and timeline required to implement the changes needed to strengthen the decentralized evaluation system, and ensure resources are allocated, implementation is properly monitored and corrective action taken, if needed.

This recommendation will require changes in systems and practices across the whole planning and project cycle, with 'evaluation' being integrated into all new initiatives as they are being developed, as well as into staff appraisal systems.

Management response: UNDP senior management is fully committed to improving the decentralized evaluation function. Challenges to be addressed include the evaluability of programmes, minimum requirements for evaluation coverage, conduct of outcome evaluations, evaluation funding and follow-up.

UNDP will continue to train staff on RBM, based on the approaches and commitments made in the new Handbook on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating for Development Results. Systems, tools and practices will be further revised, with clear accountability arrangements built in to hold senior managers in country offices, regional centres and headquarters units accountable for improvements and results focus across the whole programming cycle.

From 2010, the Management Group will discuss management responses to all independent evaluations. ADRs and their management response will be reviewed in the context of senior management discussions of results and progress against the Strategic Plan. Incentive and performance systems will be revised to motivate demand for evaluative evidence and encourage sharing and follow-up of lessons.

The Evaluation Office will continue to support UNDP senior management by providing regular briefings to the Management Group and Operations Group on recurring findings and recommendations from independent evaluations. It will continue to set standards and prepare guidelines for independent and decentralized evaluations.

The Evaluation Office is developing an e-learning course. Additionally, it will continue to collaborate with the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) on United Nations-wide training in evaluation.

The Evaluation Office will also continue to maintain the online, publicly accessible database – the Evaluation Resource Centre (ERC) – which makes available all evaluation plans, reports, terms of reference, management responses and a tracking system for follow-up actions. This aids knowledge sharing and learning, information management and oversight.

The Evaluation Office will continue to support the evaluation community of practice through ERC and continued hosting of EvalNet, the e-network on evaluation, which currently has 1,311 members.

Key actions	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
Compliance and funding				
1.1 Make full implementation of the evaluation plan attached to the country, regional and global programme documents the basis for evaluation compliance, and present it to the Board fully costed	2011 onwards	Regional Bureaux		
1.2 Revise guidance to include more options for decentralized evaluation coverage, including notably greater use of midterm outcome-oriented programme reviews. Outcome evaluation requirements will be revised to favour participation in multi-partner evaluations as agreed with national partners, while ensuring independence and credibility of the process	2010 onwards	Regional Bureaux		
1.3 Revise guidance on minimum requirements for evaluation coverage at the decentralized level	2010	Operations Support Group, Evaluation Office		
1.4 Present options for funding of decentralized evaluations to ensure full funding of UNDP evaluation plans and flexibility, depending on country need	2010	Operations Support Group, Evaluation Office		
Tools				
1.5 Revise the POPP and other tools and guidelines where necessary to ensure alignment between the Handbook, United Nations Development Group (UNDG) guidelines, good practice and policies and procedures	September 2010	Operations Support Group, Bureau for Development Policy, Capacity Development Group, Evaluation Office		
1.6 Maintain regional rosters of pre-qualified evaluation experts and institutes	2011	Regional Bureaux, with Evaluation Office quality control		
1.7 Develop an online course on evaluation	October 2010	Evaluation Office		
1.8 Manage ERC, embed Atlas and Enwiser and set evaluation standards and guidelines	Ongoing	Evaluation Office		
1.9 Amend existing tools such as the balanced score card to create incentives for achieving quality standards in M&E, including monitoring and evaluation	2011	Bureau of Management with Operations Support Group and Evaluation Office		
Monitoring and evaluation technical capacity				

1.10 Recruit at least one cohort appropriate new monitoring and evaluation advisors in each region	June 2010	Regional Bureaux		
1.11 Strengthen M&E training and implementation follow up	Ongoing	Regional Bureaux		
Use of evaluations 1.12 Elevate the systematic use of monitoring and evaluation knowledge for programme adjustments during the programme cycle, development of new programmes and advisory services and knowledge products	Ongoing	Regional Bureaux, Bureau for Development Policy, Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, Partnerships Bureau		

Evaluation recommendation 2. The senior management of UNDP will need to build on the opportunities to build national leadership and ownership in evaluation. In responding to changes introduced by the UNDG on results reporting and results frameworks used at country level, the senior management of UNDP will need to revise the new Handbook for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating for Development Results, the UNDP Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures, and other tools and guidelines.

These revisions should also recognize an ongoing need for the Evaluation Office to draw upon this data for the assessment of development results and corporate level evaluations, which are still required to meet corporate level accountability and learning objectives. The Evaluation Office should reassess its methodological guidance in the light of these changes, and work within UNEG to craft a common response on how to balance corporate and national level needs for evaluative evidence.

Management response: UNDP agrees with this recommendation. As part of oversight of country offices, Regional Bureaux will ensure increased broad-based involvement of national stakeholders and partners in the planning, management, conduct and use of evaluation, as advocated in the new Handbook for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating for Development Results.

Building on the new approaches to assessments of development results introduced by the Evaluation Office, guidance will be reinforced to encourage country offices to make more use of national systems (where appropriate), and country-led evaluations will be advocated as the option of choice wherever possible. In this regard, UNDP proposes to amend the evaluation policy to prioritize country-led approaches in the next generation of evaluations, as exemplified by the Government-led joint evaluation of the United Nations' role in South Africa and the country-led evaluations of Delivering as One pilots, which draw on the UNEG Framework Terms of Reference.

UNDP will revise the Handbook, POPP and other tools and guidelines (where necessary) to ensure alignment with the UNDG guidelines. The revisions will tackle the current lack of methodological clarity to allow credible assessment of the UNDP contribution.

For its part, the Evaluation Office will expand the evaluation methodology manual for all types of decentralized evaluations for programme units, including the outcome evaluation guidelines, in response to changes and trends at the UNDG level, particularly those stipulated in the new United Nations Development Assistance Framework guidelines.

The Evaluation Office has revised approaches and methodology for independent evaluations (ADRs and thematic) accordingly. The revised ADR method manual was completed in April 2010.

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Key actions	Time frame	Responsible entity	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
2.1 Advocate ways to strengthen the engagement of government partners in the conduct of decentralized evaluations and management responses	End 2014	Operations Support Group, Evaluation Office		
2.2 Expand methodology manual to address all types of decentralized evaluations	October 2013	Evaluation Office		
2.3 Work with UNEG on country-level evaluation approaches	Ongoing	Evaluation Office		

Evaluation recommendation 3. The Executive Board should amend the evaluation policy to institutionalize the independence of the Evaluation Office. This would include:

(a) **Recruitment of the Director of the Evaluation Office**. In the current policy, the Administrator appoints the Director of the Evaluation Office, in consultation with the Executive Board, and ensures there is no conflict of interest in employment, including limiting the term of appointment to four years, renewable once, and barring re-entry into the organization. Institutionalization of independence would be significantly strengthened if the role of the Executive Board in appointing the Director were strengthened and clearly spelled out in the policy;

(b) **Recruitment of the Evaluation Office Staff**. As long as standard UNDP human resources practice is followed, the power of the UNDAF [sic] to overrule decisions made by the Director should be removed;

(c) **Clarifying relationships**. The relationship of the Director of the Evaluation Office to other senior managers within UNDP, and on what basis the Director would participate in strategic planning processes within UNDP, should be clarified;

(d) **Expanding career opportunities for the Evaluation Office Staff**. The possibilities for Evaluation Office staff to be mainstreamed into core positions in the wider organization, with opportunities to rotate and be promoted in line with standard UNDP procedures, should be strengthened; and

(e) **Budget**. The process for setting the budget of the Evaluation Office is currently described in broad terms within the present policy, whereby the Administrator is responsible for provision of sufficient resources, and the budget is negotiated triennially with the Bureau of Management. The guiding principle should be that the budget is set to adequately fund the work programme agreed upon between the Evaluation Office and the Executive Board. Good practice would be for the budget to be approved by the Executive Board as part of the Evaluation Office workplan approval process.

Management response: We propose the following revisions to the policy:

Evaluation Office Director

The Administrator will consult with the Executive Board on the appointment, removal or dismissal of the Director. The term of the Director is four years, renewable only once. After the completion of his or her term, he or she cannot seek another appointment in the organization or

* Quality at entry refers to the UNDP accountability process.

order to avoid conflict of interest. The job description will be in line with the established UNEG Competencies for Heads of Evaluation, and the post will be advertised internally and externally. The normal UNDP recruitment procedures will be followed. The Administrator will perform the annual performance appraisal of the Director in the standard UNDP format, and the result will be shared with the Bureau of the Executive Board. There will be no review by the Career Review Group.

Evaluation Office staff

Consistent with current practice regarding support staff, the Evaluation Office will continue to follow normal UNDP recruitment procedures. As now, professional staff job descriptions will be in line with the established UNEG Competencies for evaluators, and posts will be advertised internally and externally. The Evaluation Office will conduct technical written tests and technical interviews with external UNEG members. The panel for final, competency-based interviews will include other UNDP colleagues, including a representative from the Office of Human Resources. Throughout the process, the Office of Human Resources will guide the Evaluation Office to ensure fulfilment of UNDP policies and regulations. The Director of the Evaluation Office will take the final decision on selection after the Compliance Review Board has ensured that all UNDP policies and regulations have been followed, including those concerning gender and regional balance, and has validated the selection process.

All Evaluation Office staff, including the Director, will be recruited under the terms of contract for UNDP and will adhere to the UNEG Ethical Guidelines and Code of Conduct for evaluators. The Evaluation Office staff will have the same obligations, rights and opportunities for career advancements as other UNDP staff.

Relationship between the Evaluation Office Director and the rest of the organization and his/her role in decision-making

As now, the Director will not be part of the organization's decision-making processes.

Budget

The Executive Board will continue to approve the Evaluation Office work programme and approve its budget in the context of approval of the UNDP biennial support budget.

Key actions	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
1.1 Amend the Evaluation Policy to specify that UNDP will consult with the Executive Board on the appointment, renewal or dismissal of the Director of the Evaluation Office	Every four years when the term of the Director comes to an end, or as appropriate	Administrator		
1.2 Select Evaluation Office staff following UNDP procedures	Ongoing	Evaluation Office Director		
1.3 The Evaluation Office Director will not take part in the organization's decision-making processes	Ongoing			
1.4 Continue to seek approval of the Evaluation Office budget by the Executive Board in the context of the approval of the UNDP biennial support budget	Relevant sessions of the Executive Board	Evaluation Office		

Evaluation recommendation 4. The Evaluation Office to consider the degree to which the present approach to development and implementation of assessment of development results truly contributes to country ownership. Particular issues that should be considered are: participation of

government partners in deciding the scope and focus of the assessment of development results, and consideration of the recommendations of, and management response to, the evaluation.

Management response: The Evaluation Office is introducing new approaches to assessment of development results. The Evaluation Office task manager conducts a preparatory mission to determine the most suitable approach for conducting the assessment in a given country. There are four broad approaches: (1) a team of independent consultant evaluators, led by an international team leader with the Evaluation Office task manager, conducts an evaluation; (2) joint evaluation with an independent national evaluation office and management by a joint evaluation management group (example: South Africa); (3) the government establishes a reference group to engage with the Evaluation Office in developing the terms of reference and drafting the report (examples: Ghana, Mongolia and Thailand); and (4) the Evaluation Office engages an independent national institution to carry out the evaluation (examples: China and Thailand). All assessments will continue to focus on UNDP accountability for its contribution to development results. In all cases, the independence of the evaluation team and the quality and utility of the evaluation will be guaranteed by the Evaluation Office.

UNDP will build on these new approaches for decentralized evaluations to strengthen country ownership.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
4.1 Pilot new approaches in the ADRs conducted during 2010-2011	2010-2011	Evaluation Office		

Evaluation recommendation 5. The Evaluation Office should work through UNEG to clarify (a) the comparative advantage of UNDP in building capacity for evaluation at the country level; and (b) what steps should be taken by the Evaluation Office and the respective country programmes to build on this comparative advantage.

Management response: The UNDP comparative advantage is its ability to promote and coordinate South-South and trilateral cooperation in support of capacity building for evaluation at the country level. This will be facilitated by strengthening communities of practice in evaluation and maintaining regional rosters of evaluation experts and institutes in each region (see key action 1.6 above). Building on the excellent work already being done by some country offices, UNDP will strengthen efforts to support national evaluation capacity through South-South and trilateral cooperation, when appropriate. This will be determined country by county, based on needs and UNDP comparative advantage to provide such capacity development in the country.

The Evaluation Office held a first conference on National Evaluation Capacities in Morocco in December 2009, which served as a forum for discussion of evaluation issues confronting countries and enabled participants to draw on recent and innovative experiences of other countries. The conference promoted an understanding of international standards in evaluation and advocated for evaluation to contribute to improvements in management for development results and in public accountability and learning. The conference prepared the ground for formulation of longer-term initiatives to strengthen national capacities for public policy evaluation through South-South (or trilateral) cooperation. A network has been established and annual conferences are foreseen.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
5.1 Organize regular national evaluation capacity conferences	Annually	Evaluation Office		
5.2 Support national evaluation capacity through	Ongoing	Regional Bureaux, Country		

South-South and trilateral cooperation		offices		
5.3 Strengthen communities of practice in evaluation	Ongoing	Regional Bureaux, regional service centres		

Evaluation recommendation 6. The Executive Board should consider requesting a review to be presented to the Board in 2012 covering:

- **The degree to which the roles and responsibilities laid out in the 2007 POPP and 2009 Handbook have been fully and effectively implemented;**
- **The degree to which adoption of approaches advocated in the Handbook has strengthened (i) RBM and (ii) decentralized evaluation at the country level;**
- **The degree to which independence of the EO has been institutionalized;**
- **The degree to which the policy has been implemented and made a positive contribution in UNDP's associated funds and programmes;**
- **Whether an effective approach to strengthening country ownership and capacity building has been identified and is being implemented.**

Management response: UNDP will keep the Executive Board informed of progress in implementation of the key actions.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
6.1 Regularly inform the Executive Board of progress in the implementation of the key actions	2012	Executive Office, Evaluation Office		

* Status of implementation is tracked electronically in the ERC database.